

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07

LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 SAJ-01 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 L-03

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 /084 W

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R 271759Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9404

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

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E.O. 11652: L/A

TAGS: UK, ELAB, PINT

SUBJECT: THE CONSERVATIVES AND THE UNIONS: AN OLIVE
BRANCH IS PROFFERED

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: TOMORROW (FEBRUARY 28) IN MANCHESTER,
A NUMBER OF BIG GUNS IN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. INCLUD-
ING ITS LEADEP, MRS. MARGARET THATCHER. WILL BE
PARTICIPATING IN A CONFERENCE OF CONSERVATIVE TRADE
UNIONISTS. THEY ARE EXPECTED TO LAUNCH THERE A NEW
CONSERVATIVE PARTY AOPROACH TO INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
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WHICH THEY HOPE WILL COUNTER IF NOT OBLITERATE THE

WIDELY HELD VIEW OF THE TORIES THAT THEY ARE ANTI-UNION.
A CERTAIN NUMBER OF PRIVATE APPROACHES HAVE BEEN MADE
BY THE CONSERVATIVES TO THE TRADE UNION "ESTABLISHMENT"
AS WELL, ALTHOUGH TUC LEADERS ARE SOMEWHAT WARY OF
CONSERVATIVE "OLIVE BRANCHES." END SUMMARY

2. EVER SINCE THE HEATH GOVERNMENT WENT DOWN TO DEFEAT
AFTER A MAJOR CONFRONTATION WITH THE BRITISH TRADE UNION
MOVEMENT, THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE ATTEMPTED TO REASSESS
THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TRADE UNIONS AND THEIR
APPROACH TO INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS. SHADOW SECRETARY OF
STATE FOR EMPLOYMENT, JAMES PRIOR, AND OTHER CONSERVATIVE
LEADERS, IN FACT, SOUGHT THE ADVICE OF MANY INDIVIDUALS,
INCLUDING JOURNALISTS AND FOREIGN LABOR ATTACHES. FROM
WHAT WE CAN GATHER, THEY WERE VERY FREQUENTLY ADVISED
TO RENOUNCE CONFRONTATION FOR CONSULTATION AND CON-
CILIATION.

3. AT FIRST, THE CONSERVATIVES -- OPERATING ON THE
ASSUMPTION THAT 30 PER CENT OF THE TUC'S OVER 10 MILLION
MEMBERS VOTE CONSERVATIVE -- URGED THEIR MEMBERS TO JOIN
UNIONS AND TO RUN FOR KEY POSITIONS IN IMPORTANT UNIONS.
THEY ALSO BELIEVED THAT SINCE SOME LEFT-WING TRADE UNION
LEADERS WERE ELECTED TO HIGH OFFICE ON THE BASIS OF
EXTREMELY SMALL VOTER TURN-OUT, THE PARTICIPATION OF
THEIR ADHERENTS COULD BE DECISIVE. THE CONSERVATIVE
CENTRAL OFFICE APPOINTED ANDREW ROWE, A TRENDY, RELATIVELY
YOUNG MAN, AS DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS, TO WORK
WITH SUCH CONSERVATIVE ACTIVISTS AS HE COULD FIND OR
DEVELOP. THEY ALSO SET UP SEMINARS FOR WORKERS ON TRADE
UNION AND POLITICAL ISSUES. IN ADDITION, THEY FEATURED
TRADE UNION SPEAKERS AT THEIR ANNUAL CONFERENCE LAST
YEAR IN BLACKPOOL (ALTHOUGH SOME OBSERVERS REFERRED TO
THESE INDIVIDUALS AS "TOKEN" TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES.)

4. THE EFFECT OF THIS POLICY OF "LICKING EM' BY JOINING
EM" IS NOT YET CLEAR. THERE ARE OF COURSE A NUMBER
OF PROFESSIONAL OR GOVERNMENTAL UNIONS WHICH HAVE A
RELATIVELY SIGNIFICANT CONSERVATIVE VOTING MEMBERSHIP,
SUCH AS THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICERS
ASSOCIATION (NALGO) AND -- TO A LESSER EXTENT -- THE
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ASSOCIATION OF SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND MANAGERIAL
STAFFS (ASTMS). WHICH IS LED BY THE LEFT-LEANING
CLIVE JENKINS. THESE CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS OF UNIONS OR
THOSE WHO STILL REMAIN OUTSIDE THE UNIONS THEORETICALLY
REPRESENT CONSERVATIVE FODDER FOR UNION LEADERSHIP.
HOWEVER, SUCH INDIVIDUALS FREQUENTLY SEPARATE
THEIR POLITICAL BELIEFS FROM THEIR "BREAD AND BUTTER"
CONCERN. THAT IS, THEY MAY CONTINUE TO VOTE CONSER-

VATIVE, WHILE ACCEPTING MILITANT TRADE UNION LEADERS WHO HELP RAISE THEIR STANDARDS OF LIVING AND IMPROVE THEIR WORKING CONDITIONS.

5. CURRENT TORY POLICY APPEARS TO BE EMPHASIZING THE NOTION OF POSITIVE COOPERATION AND CONSULTATION WITH THE TRADE UNIMN MOVEMENT, ALTHOUGH WITHOUT RELINQUISHING THE "LICK EM' BY JOINING EM." APPROACH. THE CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIO AOOEARS INTENT ON ESTABLISHING A REAL DIALOGUE WITH TUC LEADERS. FOR EXAMPLE, MICHAEL HESELTINE, SHADOW INDUSTRY SECRETARY, MADE A SPEECH IN

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LONDON, JANUARY L0, ANNOUNCING THAT HE WAS SEEKING THE ADVICE OF TRADE UNIONS ON HOW THEY THOUGHT INDUSTRY SHOULD BE MANAGED.

6. TOMORROW'S MEETING IS TO GO A STEP FURTHER. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE CONSERVATIVES WILL INAUGURATE A CLEARLY CONCILIATORY APPROACH TO THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT. ACCORDING TO KEITH HARPER (GUARDIAN, FEBRUARV 27), THEY WILL MAKE IT CLEAR THAT "THE NEXT CONSERVATIVE GOVERN-

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MENT WOULD NOT RETURN IN ANY VENGEFUL SPIRIT BUT WOULD ACCEPT THE IMPORTANT ROLE UNIONS PLAY IN SOCIETY." THE CONSERVATIVES ARE EXPECTED TO SPELL THIS OUT IN GREATER DETAIL AND IN PARTICULAR TO PROMISE THEY WILL NOT SIMPLY TURN THE CLOCK BACK IN THE FORM OF WHOLESALE REPEAL OF THE LABOR GOVERNMENT'S LABOR LEGISLATION. THERE WILL BE A NUMBER OF "OLIVE BRANCHES," AND THE WHOLE EXERCISE MAY WELL MARK THE SHARPEST TURNAWAY FROM CONFRONTATION SINCE THE LATTER DAYS OF THE HEATH GOVERNMENT.

7. TRADE UNION ESTABLISHMENT REACTION IS SOMEWHAT WARV. WHEN TRADE UNION AFFILIATES OF THE TUC RECEIVED LETTERS FROM HESELTINE ASKING ADVICE, THE TUC FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE ADVISED THEM TO RESPOND MAINLY BY SENDING COPIES OF THEIR ANNUAL REPORTS. HOWEVER, LEN MURRAY, TUC GENERAL SECRETARY, ACKNOWLEDGED TO US THAT THE TUC WAS MEETING INFORMALLY WITH CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERS. MORE RECENTLY, JACK JONES, IN A TV BROADCAST ON FEBRUARY 25, DECLARED "THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT NEEDS TO DEAL WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DAY, WHATEVER THE COMPLEXION OF THE GOVERNMENT MAY BE." THE TUC OF COURSE IS NOT LIKELY TO LOOK KINDLY ON ANY CONSERVATIVE MOVE WHICH WOULD AFFECT ITS GENERALLY INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LABOR PARTY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE TUC LEADER-SHIP IS COMPOSED OF REALISTS WHO REALIZE THAT GOVERNMENTS INEVITABLY COME AND GO. TUC LEADERS WILL REACT PRAGMATICALLY TO THE NEW APPROACH. IN ANY EVENT, A CONSERVATIVE POLICY OF CONSULTATION AND CONCILIATION APPEARS EMINENTLY WISE. IT COULD HELP THEM IN POLITICAL TERMS, BUT WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT, SUCH A DIALOGUE COULD CONTRIBUTE TO A MUCH NEEDED LOWERING OF THE TEMPERATURE IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND IN THE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.

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